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THE GATES OF THE COMPASS

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THE GATES
OF THE COMPASS

Also by

ROBERT HILLYER

☆

Sonnets and Other Lyrics
1917

The Five Books of Youth
1920

Alchemy: A Symphonic Poem
1920

The Hills Give Promise
1923

The Coming Forth by Day
1923

The Halt in the Garden
1925

The Seventh Hill
1928

THE GATES OF THE COMPASS

A poem in four parts
together with twenty-two shorter pieces

BY

ROBERT HILLYER

NEW YORK
THE VIKING PRESS
1930

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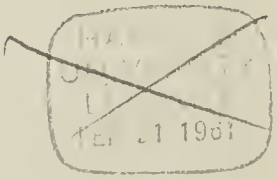

NOTE

Most of the poems in this volume were written in Pomfret, Connecticut, and Cambridge, Massachusetts; a few of them in Hartford, Connecticut, and Sandwich, Massachusetts. They represent something over two years' work,—from January, 1928, to May, 1930.

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R. S. H.

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THE GATES OF THE COMPASS

A POEM IN FOUR PARTS

"Love, and the street stones will light their hidden lamps for you; when you see the light you are on the path home."

The Happy Episode

I

MEMORY

The huntsman riding through the fogs of dawn
Lifts to his lips the horn of twisted gold
And blows two bell-like notes through glen and hollow
Mournfully keen as smoke of autumn leaves.
For ever young he rides a dying horse,
For ever on the chase though no stag flies,
Attended only by those double echoes
The soul and flesh, the day and night of time.
Until the blindfold of the fog between
His eyes and the far reaches of the day
Grows thin, and all around him he beholds
A countryside bathed in the light of dream.
And there dismounting, he goes forth alone
And blows the single golden note of peace.

If from all memories you ravelled one
Down the dark labyrinth of mind, what doors
Would open and what vistas be revealed
Among the many pasts you have forgotten?
I ask you of your birthplace, and you tell
Of leafy streets, a frame house on a terrace,
An apple tree with boughs that touched the ground
And made a cave of cider-smelling earth.

But dive beneath your thoughts. There you remember

The new-flung planet flaming into space
When it gave birth to something kin to you
In the dim dawn of life. Dive farther yet
And you will find perhaps like a deep pearl
Sunk under leagues of troubled sea, your self.
If from all memories you ravelled one
You could return behind time's double rhythm
And casting off the blindfold walls of space
Look clearly on what now is mystery.
But memory is frail and tenuous,
An evening cobweb drifting on the air
That weaves a rainbow down its wavering length,
Divides, entangles other strands, till soon
You are enmeshed in clinging gossamers
So subtle that to bind one to a thought
Were to destroy the airy fantasy.

Two bells that ring through fog,—what sorrow moves
Uneasily behind the curtained years?
Follow that memory until you see
A small boy grimy with the July heat
Sitting disconsolate upon the steps,
His eyes full, his chin cupped in his hands;
O many years ago, and yet you find

Your heart not uncompassionate of his.
The air was milky with the powder smoke
From firecrackers. All the afternoon
Two slow bells tuned a minor third apart
Clang after clang rang out the solemn news:
The Spanish fleet is sunk, the Spanish fleet
Is sunk at Santiago. . . . The Spanish fleet,
The Spanish fleet is sunk at Santiago.
The tears stung through the grime upon your cheeks
And you were dully sure that through all time
This sorrow would not fade. Those were your ships
That had been sunk, you loved their sounding names
And all their strangeness; they were proud and golden
Armadas on the oceans of your fancy,
Freighted with the imaginings of days,
Each day a lifetime; now they were yours no longer,
Nor ships, nor cargo, nor the dreams of them.
The elegant *Vizcaya*, curved and gilded,
The slim *Teresa*, her long masts aslant,
The *Almirante Oquendo*, high of prow,
The *Cristobal Colon*, her funnels set
Rakishly fore and aft the single mast,
And the destroyers, *Pluton* and *Furor*,
The pitiful, the vincible armada,

Scarce worth the Sunday morning's target practice.
You knew them all from keel to fighting-tops,
And saw the dawn-red waters of the harbour
As one by one against the shoreline hills
The doomed ships poured to gain the open sea.
The flames leapt from their funnels as they flew
And the foam fountained in a double jet
Before their prows; but speed, desperate speed
Was quite in vain. The grey ships hemmed them in,
The first gun boomed, a hundred others answered,
And the air whined and flickered with the shells.
As the first courser in a cavalry charge
Struck by a bullet jumps into the air
And stumbles to his death, the stricken ships
Reared to the sheet of flame, wallowed, and swung
In aimless curves, then brandishing their masts
Against the sky, cast up their gilded sterns
And burst with dull explosions undersea.
The two bells of that shabby triumph clang,
Still clang, the bells of victory still clang,
Unto this day time booms upon two bells
With drift of drizzling echoes in the mist,
For when your Spanish ships went down, you learned
That by whatever names they may be called,

Things beautiful and happy are foredoomed.
Your childish heart held more than childish woe
Not to be comforted till you should see
The Spanish fleet come sailing home from limbo,
And even fancy could not blur the knowledge
That they would never come, and that was ended.
There was a horror in the victory,
Something eternal left you at that moment
Confirmed apprentice to your master, Time.

Seize on another strand of memory
And follow. You were playing blind man's buff
With other children in a darkening room.
The bandage pressed so tight upon your eyes
That stars and flashes flickered to and fro.
You were bewildered as your playmates changed
To savage ambushes of touch and sound,
Brushing against you, pinching, plucking at you,
And muttering in far corners of the room.
You heard soft footsteps going away, and then
Nothing but silence. Were they gone? or hiding?
You waited a long while, grew slowly frightened,
Then cold with panic snatched the blindfold off
And stared into the void of a black room.

You were alone. Through the two open windows
Where the blue twilight glimmered, two bells clanged.
You whispered, "I must run into the hall."
Then with a voice that scarcely could be heard:
"Is anybody here?" "Of course, of course,
Turn up the gas. Darling, it's only a game;
Look, here's your rabbit. Here is Doctor Bun.
Now Doctor Bun, tell him it was a game;
They didn't mean it; everything's all right."
And so your patent of mortality
Was sealed, both by the double note of time
And the dark walls of space, which hedged you in
Henceforth from the wide reaches of the day.

You tell me you were born . . . where was it then?
I have forgotten. Follow deeper still
To a world blind with steam through which the sun
Glimmers uncertainly with bloodshot light.
There you stand in ooze up to your ankles,
And all around except for where the sea
Whimpers along the edges of the marsh
The jungle closes in with drip of leaves
And gurgle of hot mud where bubbles swell
With vapour, puff, collapse, and swell again.

A scaly head comes bulging through the muck
And stares with witless and unwinking eyes.
Then the ground heaves, a tremor quivers through it,
The fog sighs palely with a lightning flash,
Low thunder booms, and from the middle sky
The echo travels back in minor thirds.
There in that shadowless expanse you stand
While something horrible you can not name
Gathers along your spine. The fog thickens
And then the horror is upon you. Night.

O well to live above these memories,
Well for your reason in his upper sky
To shine through the clear air of fact, nor pierce
Too deep into the fog of nether worlds.
O well for you . . . but think not to forget
The savage birthplace I remember for you.
Look at the pliant skin which clothes your hands,—
Look closer. Ah, the lizard scales, the pores
Agape to breathe the hot steam of the marsh.
The jungle seethes, and lust with roving eyes
That shine through darkness, leaps upon despair
And mates with her. And when the wandering moon

Half-seen through never-lifting depth of fog
Has nine times closed her circle in the dawn
Despair brings forth the wonder-child of lust.
These were your parents in that early birthplace
And in the lowest marches of your mind
They prowl the jungle of the double thunder
Screaming against the filtered light of reason
As dogs behowl the moon, till reason's self,
Faint with the fumes from those primeval fens,
Swoons in the zenith. O desperate one,
Will you return to that dank world you left
Æons ago, or plunging boldly through it
Traverse yet farther to that other day
Which lies beyond it, where the unbroken light
Before the worlds were, brought you into being.
If in the short progression of this earth
You have thrown wide the doors of life and seen
The jungle creatures, shrunk to tiny vermin,
Scatter from sight among the mouldy walls,
And the vast trees, diminishing through ages,
Become the fronds of horsetail and of fern
You trample down on paths of afternoon,
You shall yet see all things that knew the jungle
Shrink, while the spirit grows till it behold

This burnt-out planet smaller than an ember
Whirling from sight along an autumn wind.

At dawn when you awake from your short sleep
And the poor dream of living that you had,
You shall arise and wash your heart with laughter
Under the trees beside the shadowed waters.
Come, snatch the blindfold off, and hush the bells
That ring against the Spanish fleets of dream,
Behold around the final headland steaming,
Vizcaya, Cristobal Colon, Oquendo,
Teresa, Pluton, Furor,—homeward bound.

II

DEATH

We come on leaden feet, we come with leaden
Tread along the haunted corridors
Through darkness void as in a dying brain
Where one by one the thoughts have flickered out.
The curves of our grey surplices flow soft
In every crevice of your memory,
And not an ingle of your mind or body
Eludes our still invasion. You shall hear
The fields whispering under the thin rain
Raw on autumnal earth though spring is here.
We will wring acid tears that bite the eyes
For someone dead whom you have never seen;
Hear how unending rain upon his grave
Seeps downward till it whimpers on his bones.
He loved the glow of fire upon his hands
That now lie splashed with mud beneath the rain,—
Think of him out there when you wake at midnight.

You never knew him, but we tell you, we
Whose office is to enlist the death-watch for him,
In him you weep the doom that is your own.
Look at your hands, the blue veins showing through,
Fantastically outlined against the fire,

The rain will sog the fingers like the petals
Which lie on the wet grass when spring is done.

You will remember Love, cry out to Love,
Who held your body close against the world,
You will remember how the arms of Love
Were round you in the little curtained room
Where the clock ticked. You will remember how
With every slash of rain against the window
When the wind wailed, she drew you ever closer
And pressed you down, so safe, so kind she was
And joyful in the secret gifts of love.
You will call out to her from underground
As children from their nightmares call for help:
Beloved, look! My body is so cold,
The earth seeps in on me and the cold rain;
Fling back the curtain, tell me this is a dream,
Wake me! deliver me! I am gagged with death.
She will not hear you, she will never come.

You did not know the dead man, so you say.
But you have known those who have followed him.
Think of them out there. What? so soon forgotten?
And of what merits, then, are you possessed

To ensure a longer dwelling in remembrance?
Think of each one in turn. Give them your name,
Think how they held their hands out to the fire
And glowed through every vein. They saw no end
To the anatomy of thought and sinew
Which made their universe,—themselves the universe;
They were important beings to themselves.

Count over all your friends, your loves, your children,
And say, I have been dead a year or two;
How fondly am I living through their lives?
Go through them slowly, one by one by one.
Your friends recall you once or twice a year
To try the idiom of tenderness
Wherein you are no more than is a title
Set to a poem perfect in itself.
Your loves dared not to think of you a while,
And then they merely did not think of you,
And when at last in the gay resurrection
Nature reserves for those who have not died
They looked into new eyes and love bewildered
Their mortal boughs with burgeoning again,
How should they ponder over the dead leaves,
How should they turn away from the clear look

Of favour in the eyes of life, to brood
On dim reproaches in the eyes of death
Sunk in their skull beneath the drenching rain?
Your children have inherited your wealth,
The most persuasive comforter of woe,
Or else, perhaps, your poverty, and they
Speak never of you, lest too bitterly.
O sooner than the earth recalls its own,
Before the flesh unfastens from the bone,
The memory of you buried in the heart
Of one still living softly falls apart.
Your face upturned against the earth and rain
Outlasts the image of it in his brain,
Your phantom tread on stairways of his thought
Falters, recedes, grows fainter, and is gone.
Even your senseless immortality
Of grass rots in the rain.

But now you say
You hear your heart still ticking? You still live?
But listen closer, the beat fluctuates,
The arteries swell with uncertain pulse
And all within you, the corrupted highway

Of nerves and muscles, rutted and worn away
With traffic of your many joys and sorrows,
Grows lax in the foreboding of its end.

We come with leaden footsteps, we will wake
You under the midnight, we will wake you under
The midnight when the world has fallen away.
Life has receded from you like a tide,
Leaving the flats to view, where empty shells
Of dead experience echo the ebbing waves.
We will remember for you all your follies,
The bungled kiss, the passionate ineptness,
We will compute the garner of the years,
The eyes grown dim to colour, ears to sound,
Nostrils to perfume, every nerve gone slack
To untune the instrument on which you played
Such gallant music for your little while.
We come with leaden tread, we come on leaden
Feet; you shall go with us, you shall go
With us down to the deeper caves of midnight,
While the unending rain falls on the earth,
Drumming on roofs, on pavements, on the graves
Of men who loved the warmth upon their hands,

And sweet sensations in a little room.
Listen! your heart is growing fainter, Listen!
It leaps once and . . . Listen! Only the rain
On midnight fields from which no harvest comes.

III

ECSTASY

We are the glory-dancers, we will dance
You over the mountain, we will dance you over
The mountain, we will dance you over the sea.
Our feet will flash before you among the crags
Or dart along the seaways. You will say
The twinkle of sun is dazzling to my eyes.
—But listen! and you will hear the rainbow. Listen,
And you will hear us shout. Listen, and you,
Borne on that music, will slide sideways into
The air, your body itself will float in ether.
Perhaps you will say, I do not like this song;
It minds me of the swan who sings and dies,
Or of the swan who curses God and dies,
Or of the swan who sees Naples and dies.
Curses and sees, and dies. Or sings and dies.
—But lift out of the death. Lift with a song
Out of the death. Lift with the song of death!
Or perhaps you will say, be with me for this moment
Of ecstasy, and then begone, begone,
Lest I should see your face among the books
I read for my employment in the alley.
—Let us be tiger-hearted, let us be
Tiger-hearted, let us be suns of splendour,

Swift and sleek along the dewdrops of weeds
That scare the ploughman ploughing for lonely bread.

O coward, you have dreamed it! you have floated
Heavenward over the eyes of applauding friends.
Do you need a dream for flight? do you need a dream
To launch into the air aslant with yielding?
Do you need the plaudits of your friends to fly?
Take life then as a dream, take us for friends,
For we invisible are nimbler still
Than you, though you traverse the centuries
Full thirty cubits down Egyptian mould.
For we are wingless, being ourselves the wings.
We will applaud you, we will seize the crowns
Of Ætna and Vesuvius to fling
Across your orbit. We will make you proud
Knowing ourselves profundities of pride
And dream beyond your Romes and Arcadies.
Beneath our eyes the iron cities rust,
And kings show meanly in grey films of dust
On which the housemaid writes her name; we are
The light between the telescope and star,
Out-riding years of light. We fling ourselves
Into the void while constellations sing.

Snow falls on snow till worlds are buried in snow,
Flowers on flowers till deserts are paths of sand,
And oceans, pools in a garden too large for the heartbeat
Of any except two lovers when you are one,
Of any except two lovers when all are one.
Look not for our footsteps in summer unless you are clever
In charting the path of the wind on the leaves. Perhaps
In winter the swirl of our merriment brushing the snowdrifts
Will give you a pattern. Perhaps if you swim undersea
You will find, even fainter than tracks from the fin of a
minnow,
The figures our swift minuet will inscribe on the sand.

We are the glory-dancers. We dance glory
To you and to ourselves; our feet discharge
Long yellow flashes as of flint on steel
Between red Mars and white Aldebaran.
We are the glory, we are the dancers, you
Will dance with us, you will dance glory with us,
Over the mountain, over the ocean, over
The mountain, over the sea, beyond the mountain,
Beyond the mountain and the sea. Beyond.

IV

LOVE

Here in this courtyard deep amid the forest
The sleeping beauty slept her thousand years.
The summer sunlight of the afternoon
So long ago when dusty moths of slumber
Fluttered along the sunbeams to her eyes
Persuading them to sleep, still lingers here.
And on the air waiting for her to waken
Hang fragrances of yet unfaded flowers
And halted half-songs of the mating birds.
She is so young that older eyes beholding
Would cloud with shameful pity to awake her,
So frail like a lost phrase of music climbing
Toward beauties never to be heard in sound.
Only her breath still moves among the leaves,
And where the sea-foam edge of silk has slipped
Along her body when she sank in sleep,
Her breasts so gently that they scarcely move
Rise and fall half-veiled in rosy shadow
And half in amber sunlight gleaming free.
She is so young, if in her ear you murmured
Awake, beloved! she would dream of love
As children of their mothers' arms at twilight.
Let him beware who from a distant country
Comes riding through the fogs of early morning

And lifting to his lips the twisted horn
Blows the single golden note of peace.
Let him beware lest after sudden waking
She look on him with the child's eyes too long.

He stood a moment at the open gateway,
The golden horn still vibrant in his hand,
His head flung back, his nostrils still alert
With the hard breath of youth, his shoulders bare,
And every muscle taut with readiness
For dangers by the wayside; then his eyes,
Clouded with autumn memories, grew keen
As if a wind had swept them. He bent down
And kissed her brow, and said, "This is for waking."
And as she stirred uneasily and sighed,
He too was shaken and the breath was bound
Within him till his heart laboured. "And this,
This is for love." His lips on hers were gentle
Lest he unseal too soon the full desire
Ill-mated to the frail awakening.
"And this for life." He kissed the shadowed eyelids
And slowly, slowly as a butterfly
New-come into the light unfolds its wings
Dewy and tremulous, her eyelids lifted,

The lashes quivered from her cheek, and then
She gazed, her blue eyes lighting with mute laughter
That questioned not, clear as a wakened child's.
She said then, "I am weary of this place,
And I have waited long." He would have spoken
But his voice choked with tears and was ashamed.

As if with deep foreknowledge like the earth
Which murmurs spring before the spring is heard,
She slipped her hand in his and led him forth
Through secret ways that opened on a hill
Where the wind rippling up the grass sent waves
Of green to lose themselves against the sky
And downward tumbled glittering waters, shouting
Of waterfalls and oceans yet to come.
The lovers wandered, neither daring now
One word of what their hearts were clamouring,
Until, his arm through hers, he turned her toward him
And face to face they trembled in the sunlight.

He whispered, "Are the eyes that dreamed so long
Of love afraid of love?" "They are not afraid,"
She answered, "they are dazzled with the sun."
"Let us throw off our dreams then; let us cast

Our fears away," he said, "as we threw off
Our garments; let us, naked of our past,
Climb up the flowery slope. Be now your heart
My heart, the quickening beat in both the song
Of lovers climbing hills in early morning.
Your breath that slumbered for the thousand years
And mine that battled with the wind are mingled
In the strong gasp of happiness prevailing
Yet for a swifter pulse and richer blood
To sweep through every vein; O may this hill
Not end, O may we never reach the crest
But like a bird that out of sight and hearing
Spirals upward in the ecstasy
Of death, mount to the sun. . . . O my Beloved,
Are you afraid?" "No, not afraid, not now.
Let us a while lie here in the long grass
And as our heartbeats slow to calmer pace
Still be their measure one. I fear only
That I should sleep and wake to find you gone,
Sleep for a thousand years, and find you gone.
Or else that death should come on one of us;
No, I am not afraid of love," she said.
He lifted up his hand and pointed far
Where range on range the blue hills fell away.

"Those lie before us, or before our children,
And we have passed beyond the fear of death
Who have passed beyond the fear of love. O never
Shall death come near us now. I can not tell you
Whether we still are on the whirling earth
Or far beyond it, unaware immortals;
I can not tell you whether we shall always,
You with your name and I with mine, go forth
To climb the hills before the dew has left them.
But if not we, our children; and if not
This love of ours, the same love born in them.
What more of everlastingness could gods
Ask than to behold their flesh renewed
In fairer bodies and their old desires
Flowering from greener stems that are their own?
Happy were I to be as now for ever,
But change is on the world and if we change
We shall but leave this to our fairer selves,—
The rest is but a love of little names."
But as he spoke she turned away from him
And gazed far down the slope whence they had come,
Back to the sleeping palace, and beyond it
The forest wrapped in fog, whence mournfully
Sounded the echoes of two bells. He smiled

Seeing she had not heard him, and was silent
Until a darker thought swam over him
Like clouds across the sunlight, and he shuddered.
"I seemed to hear . . . was it two bells I heard?
Was it the slash of rain against the window
Before we died? Forgive me, I am strange
To credit happiness. I thought you dead
And would have gathered up the pitiful dust
That was your body, held it in my hand,
And breathing on it, blown my life away
For east or west to gather, autumn or spring.
I would have shed my years to stand beside you
Leafless, shed my hearing and my sight,
My thoughts, since you were no more to be heard
Or seen nor thought of; yes, and before that
I can remember weariness of worship
In those few days of our companionship
When I consumed you utterly, and still
With the last atom of your excellence
Yearned for you more. I would have lost myself
Wholly in you, held nothing back, I would
Have been you only, though at last your dust
Was little on my palm." "Let death go by,"
She answered, "in the wind rustling the leaves,

Depart without departure, blow away
And still blow on, only its music lingering."
Then artfully and timidly, she asked him,
"During my thousand years of sleep where were you
Besides the broken dream I had of you?
I saw the sunlight chequered through the trellis
And would have asked that life go on for ever
With music and with toys and make-believe.
But suddenly I slept. Where were you then
Through all that pausing summer afternoon?
—Tell me, for I am jealous of the past."
"I too might well have slept. There is no story
Which is not you, Beloved. What befell me
Might befall any man. Perhaps I learned
More of deceit than most because I trusted
All men and women more than most. My friends
Betrayed me, women lied to me; and once
I swung my sword against reputed foes
Who when the fog of battle cleared away
Whispered with dying lips my brother's name."
"Peace, that is over. Tears for that dead sorrow
Would kill the living joy. Those countries now
Are less than dreams and the lost dreamers there
Have all forgotten you. Your friends remembered

Your name a while; your loves dared not remember,
But all are one now in forgetting you."
He laughed. "That was a dread I had at midnight,
Now it is like a cup of sunny wine
To lips that shuddered, thinking it of hemlock.
So long, so bitter, the weeping upon earth,
So short the hours under the drunken arbour
Where body and body search the plangent nerves
And find no answer to their loud demanding.
All have we done that mortal things can do,
We have been born, been loved, been slain and buried,
And still unsatisfied because our beauty
Is greater than we gave or could be taken,
We have done nothing, all has worked upon us,
Loved us too much and left us after love
In bondage of inaction. Not until
I put behind me the false loves which are
But vanity that feeds on adoration,
Not till I scattered them, their flatteries
Still mouthing on the air, and sought you out
Could I be sure that death and you were parted,
That dust was not a rival, that I could
Ride back and back through calendars of doubt
And find you in the end as in the beginning."

She said again, "These thousand years, where were you?
Tell me, for I am jealous of your past."
"Must I remember? there are planes of music
Which would bring back without an absent tinge
The little curtained room, the log fire burning,
And the old love, but all these moments knew
Themselves foredoomed, seeing within the crystal
Of their own ecstasy the grey forms gathering,
Cowled, with averted gaze, because their joy
Was but a song beleaguered by the silence.
There were no loves which were not you, Beloved.
Till now when I am healed, there was no time
I did not seek you to fulfill the dream
You had during your long sleep and forgot.
Before the world was; yes, before the thought
Of any world had sundered the great light
Into the rainbow, then we were together
And now we are together once again.
That is enough, O trust me! though you saw
Me prowling jungles of despair and lust
To mate with monstrous loves within my thought.
And I am here as one who finds redemption
Out of his earnings in another world."
"Shall I confess," she whispered, "that I dreamed

Without forgetfulness? But of that dream
I can not tell you all, nor any woman
Tell to any man. I saw you shaping
My image through so many others, saw them
The hateful and the beautiful, myself
In many forms adroit to do your pleasure
According to your will. For you I was
Savage and desperate under the wan moon,
I was the handmaid of your self-esteem
Or the deliverer from fear. I slept
Not peacefully who dreamed so many shames.
I could not waken to this happiness
Till you were weary of my counterfeits
And sought me out and bade me rise, myself,
None other, so made perfect in your love."

They sat in silence fingering the grasses,
Their thoughts halted within their minds, and peace
Of certainty through all their quiet veins.
Then he stood up and looked a while at her
With kind eyes smiling as from miles away,
And thought of wordless things for which the music
Shrilled from each grass blade on the basking hill.
And bending over kissed her once again

And lifted her beside him. Long they stood
Hand in hand and found no more to say
While the full light of noon shone through the rocks
And the world reeled with radiance to their sight.
At last with wistful eyes already looking
Back to the place of their first happiness
As if two bright immortals should look back
And pause a moment in their mounting joy
To gaze farewell, and fondly, on the earth,
They went their way, diminishing to sight
Across green levels to the second hillside
While circling birds wove them a crown of song.
They tarried then beneath a blossoming grove
Of locust trees, whence came the sound of waters,
And twilight found them starting up the hill
Now far away and small like dying echoes
Or embers waning out so tenderly
The air will tremble after them, and none
Can say just when they ceased, or if they still
Abide or but the memory of their passing.
So as things beautiful to mortal eyes
Fade from pursuit of all but errant thought
Which following beyond the rim of knowledge
Dares not report the happiest of tidings

Lest they be only guesses of desire,
So faded the two lovers up the hillside,
And yet when they had seemed for ever vanished
They glimmered in the half-light as they passed
Over the fields between the scattered copses.
And when the veering wind blew straight across
From hill to hill, their voices floated back,
A murmured phrase, sometimes a gust of laughter.
And as the evening star rose clear before them
They reached the summit of the second hill,
Where lifted to a momentary glory
They stood against the sky, and so were gone.

Cambridge—Pomfret,
January–May, 1930.

AN OLD WOMAN

I had a dream of Sunday afternoon
When it was late in March and mottled blue
Showed warmer sky as if the winter slowly
Thawed away from airy meadows blooming
With patches of the spring as drifts of cloud
Melt at the edges and dissolve in mist.

I look out from the window, a long line
Of leafless poplars brushes against the sky;
Pools stand in hollows of the sidewalks, ruffled
With gusts of wind. And then a tall old woman
Comes round the corner of an endless street.
No one I know. And yet perhaps I know her;
She will talk high and shrill as if she pressed
With every word some claim against the world.
Deep in her mind her past lies in a clutter,
The jumbled cargo of a foundered galleon,
Where with forgotten gewgaws and the frills
Of dead desires, the glint of timeless gold
Winks upward through the wash of many years.

She has ruled empires, she has signed her name
To death warrants. She has sent out her armies
To slay her foes, and she has slain her lovers.

Daughters and sons she had, and them she ruled
And slew at last to feed her hungry age.
She has been humbled, struck down to her knees
By other women speaking through one man;
She has been widowed and has fed her children
Hour by hour her own life to their need.
In the dark milltown where the rain falls black
She rose before the dawn and went to work
Down the wet street between the factories.
All day she bent above the flapping belts
That turned the wheels of livelihood, and after,
When lamps were lighted, she went home again.
She has been priestess over all the priests,
And when her sons and husband scoffed at God
She lighted candles under the Madonna
And whipped her men to silence if not prayer.

Old woman stumbling down the final street,
You bore us, fed us, murder us at last;
Old earth, old woman, mother and murderer,
Old planet in the winter of your age,
Your orbit shrinks as younger planets rush
From nothingness trailing triumphant fire.

A SUMMER NIGHT

The night is a shrill rhythm of insects,
The lighted windows that showed through the leaves
One by one go out. "Goodnight,"
A voice murmurs in the shadow of vines,
"Goodnight," and for ever is in the voice.
An old violinist crosses the Fenway
And watches the lights go out. He can almost
Hear the sigh of the weary bodies.
A freight train puffs ponderously, far
Away to the eastward, and down the highway
A belated motor crowded with singing
Revelers careless of slumber passes
With raucous shout that ribbons to silence.
If only God would step from the stars
And lead his own composition, if only
An old violinist might put his bow
And his violin away for ever.
He hears from under his arm where he clutches
The case, the twang of a plucked string;
The damp of the Fens is chill on the sinews
Of old men and old violins.
But the crickets and treetoads make sweet din
In the meadows, the fireflies spiral downward
Like dropping fragments of moonlight. Strange,

These small accompaniments of desire
Outlive desire itself and its memory.
The city would wholly sleep but for me,
He says, but for me and the arc-lights buzzing
And twitching uneasily in their globes
Like thoughts in a mind when the sun has gone.
He draws from his pocket a thick gold watch
And holds it up. It is half-past two.
Foolish for one to consult the time
On a golden dial this summer night
Who might more wisely be counting the leaves
Of seventy scattered calendars.

OVERHEARD

The grey sea beach was empty but for three
Who paced the foamline of the rising tide.
The two, mother and son, looked out to sea,
The third, invisible, walked at their side.
He shouted to them. (Hear the salt wind sighing.)
He wrung his hands. (The air is growing chill.)
He cried aloud, "You see the grey gull flying,
Can't you see me, Matilda? Can't you, Bill?"

A sudden notion swept into her head:
"You look more like your father all the time."
"I don't! I look just like myself," he said,
And then both smiled like partners in a crime.
The third was writhen into wisps of pain
And scattered into the grey fog again.

PLATITUDE

Dull platitude, worn coin from wisdom's mint,
You purchase still your phrase's worth of truth
While clever counterfeits for all their glint
Buy but the penny sophistries of youth.
Lacklustre, thin, the date illegible,
Scarred by the teeth of every sceptic age,
Your metal still rings true as when it fell
New-moulded from the furnace of a sage.

The novelty of noon is out of date
By night; the timeless gold, however worn,
In undiminished worth will circulate
From hands long dust to others yet unborn.
Let counterfeiters buy the world! The wise
Save thriftily for larger merchandise.

FROM THE FOOTHILLS

By many paths we reach the single goal,
And all our quarrels deal but with its name;
There is no soul so different from my soul
As in its essence to be not the same.
No warrior but in his heart must know
How triumph is not proud nor vengeance sweet,
For he beholds, who slays the kindred foe,
Himself, self-murdered, lying at his feet.

It has been written that we are the islands
Which, ocean-sundered into seeming twain,
Are truly of one continent, the highlands
Wrought of one rock and rooted in one plain.
Bright Himalayan peace! the humblest crest
One with the splendour of Mount Everest.

OPEN SEASON

I saw the deer dancing in leafy places
Swift as the echo from a hunting horn,
But leaden death commands yet swifter paces,—
You shall not see the deer, you yet unborn.
I heard the singing V of ducks in flight
Heavenward bending, but the sudden guns
Fluttered them earthward on the shoals of night,—
They will not fly against your rising suns.

We have killed all things beautiful and free
Except one creature, fleet though driven hard;
Swifter than deer it runs, in singing V
Still passes through the daybreak heavenward.
If from our deadly wood and reedy shoal
It yet escape, cherish the hunted soul.

EARLY DECEMBER

I think it were not very hard to die
Looking straight down this dank suburban street
Where parallels of leafless maples meet
Except for one wan triangle of sky.
A cold December afternoon might lie
For ever on this town, eternal sleet
Thud on it, while with rubber-sloshing feet
And taut umbrellas, ages tiptoe by.

Today or later, it is all the same,
A few less logs to keep the fire going,
A few less drinks to steady prancing nerves;—
There is a country—I forget its name
But I have dreamed of it—where sun is glowing
And all the streets are laid in aimless curves.

CASINO

In Monte Carlos of the sky I tossed
My savings down, even my hopes of winning;
Worlds flickered, and I knew that I had lost
Before the vast roulette whcel ceased from spinning.
I can't accuse the Croupier of fraud,
Though Time, his bouncer, is a hooligan,
And Luck, his serving woman, is a bawd;—
These are immortal; I am but a man.
Of course, I could go bankrupt and produce
Sole asset, just one little piece of lead,
But I suspect that all too simple ruse
Would treble my indebtedness. Instead
I'll pay him day by day the total score,
Bet life again,—and lose it as before.

PORTRAIT

Quick with your paints and palette there! the colour
Ebbs from my languid arteries. Be quick!
I feel my hair grow grey, my eyes grow duller,
And all the youthful contour blurred and thick.
I hear your nervous brushes rub and click,
Racing with time to catch my brief reflection,
And keenly hear the numbered minutes tick,
Outdistancing your patience for perfection.
Can you retrace the mask of life, the section
Of universal chaos that is I?
The scars of flame, the gleams of resurrection
From loves that wither into lusts that die?
O do be quick! before these vanish hence,
Leaving a blank of bland indifference.

XXth CENTURY

There is no time,
No time,
There is no time,
Not even for a kiss,
Not even for this,
Not even for this rhyme.

It is May
And blossoms sway
In sifted snow
Under the moon.
I only know
That I can not stay,
For today is May
And tomorrow June.

An arrow shot
From an idiot's bow,
That is my lot
And I must go.

There is no time,
No time,
There is no time,

Not even for a kiss,
Not even for this,
Not even for this rhyme,—
No . . . !

TOO MUCH REPOSE

My pilgrim staff is in the rack,
  My heart has slowed its pace,
The journey's done, I have come back
  To slumber in this place.

A phrase of poetry, a bar
  Of music may release
The wild disport, the comrade star,
  Beyond the walls of peace.

But I shall never breathe a word
  That might tell tales on me;
I'll say, "It's nothing but a bird
  Out in the frozen tree.

"I shivered? Well, that's strange; perhaps
  The fire is burning low.
I'll get some logs. But no, those chaps
  Are younger. Let them go."

REUNION

Now welcome back, and health! he said.
After so many years apart
I thought that half of us were dead
And half in wheel chairs or deranged.
Sit down! We all have lots to tell;
It warms the cockles of my heart
To see how little you have changed . . .
The clock ticked on. *Farewell, farewell.*

Here's whiskey, John; here's brandy, Ned;
What's yours, old man? I'm glad to see
There's not one grey hair on your head;—
Why, hang it! you look twenty-five.
The world's your oyster; I'm the shell,
But at this moment I should be
Thankful I'm even still alive . . .
Farewell. The clock ticked on. *Farewell.*

There's Bill and Toby over there
Just as they used to be, he said.
They'll wrangle all the night, that pair,
After so many years apart.

Fill up,—lots more when this is gone;
Don't sit there staring like the dead.
Good God! Something is at my heart . . .
Farewell, farewell. The clock ticked on.

AGEING COQUETTE

The rusty sawing in the grass
  Goes with the autumn in the air,
And now the dame before her glass
  Weeps at her wisps of hair.

She, so aghast at katydids,
  Will shriek to see the flakes of snow,
While frantically she tears the lids
  Off rouge-pots in a row.

Vanity is a little sin
  But tedious;—if she will not doff
That lamentable, wornout skin,
  Then, Winter, *blow* it off!

LATE

The tracks stretch into fog for ever,
Lifeless but for the iron humming
That thrills them when the train is coming.

The long rails hum, the air is roaring,
Black smoke into the grey fog pouring.

Hundreds of faces behind glass
Like fish in an aquarium
In agitated flashes pass
And end. And now the rails are dumb.
The whirling cinders sting and choke
The man left gasping in the smoke.

If parallels should intersect,
Euclid, a demonstrated liar,
Would crumble, and the western flier
Ungeometrically be wrecked.

Outcast in fog from sun and sky,
You watch the western flier go by,
And you have missed your train for ever.

DEAD MAN'S CORNER

Here is the crossroads where the slain
Were piled so deep we could not pass.
Now dreams alone renew the stain
Of blood long soaked into the grass.

If ambulance to save the maimed
Or gunwagon to maim the sound,
Both must proceed, while rightly named
The Mort Homme darkens all the ground.

As long ago wheels took the groove
In necessary roads again,
Crunching the bones that could not move
To move the limbs of living men;

With cracked and beaten lips that taste
Commands like acid but obeyed,
We still with leaden nightmare haste
Convey our shadows through the shade.

War is a most forgotten fear
But peace will not be out of mind.
We drive our ambulances here
God help us! and the road is blind.

A FAILURE

Evening has come, young man;
What have you done today?

I have fashioned a younger man
Out of the ageless clay.
He will pass invisible
Through crowds in the market square;
They will say, "Did you hear a bell?"
They will say, "How queer to smell
Incense in open air!"
Wherever he plants his feet,
Wherever he skims his heel,
The air will go mad and sweet,
The asphalt will skirl and reel.
They will say, "We can hear the beat
Of a mighty revolving wheel
In a powerhouse far off."

Young man, that is not enough.

THE SWAN

Between the sedge and water's edge,
The clean white, the swan in flight.

Wan with long sorrows of men
I followed and found my mate again.

And then I knew I flew alone,
Alone, yet echoing of two.

Beyond the west, forget not thou,
O vanished swan, thy mate, that now
Must nest uneasy in my breast.

LATE FIREFLY

A month too late one firefly
  Cruises the night alone,
Strayed from the meadows of July
  Beneath an August moon.

Slowly above the sleeping phlox
  It mounts the rungs of air,
Until the cloudy moonlight mocks
  The solitary flare.

A starboard light far out at sea,
  A lantern on the fens,
Are lonely, but this lamp to me
  Is lonelier than men's.

LULLABY

The long canoe
Toward the shadowy shore
One . . . two . . .
Three . . . four . . .
The paddle dips,
Turns in the wake,
Pauses, then
Forward again.
Water drips
From the blade to the lake.
Nothing but that,
No sound of wings;
The owl and bat
Are velvet things.
No wind awakes,
No fishes leap,
No rabbits creep
Among the brakes.
The long canoe
At the shadowy shore,
One . . . two . . .
Three . . . four . . .
A murmur now
Under the prow

Where rushes bow
To let us through.
One . . . two . . .
Upon the shore,
Three . . . four . . .
Upon the lake,
No one's awake,
No one's awake,
One . . . two . . .
No one, not even you.

IN THE TIDAL MARSHES

White above the afterflare
The moon rides up the brimming air
Singing in minor key the theme
Of light as music in a dream.
Lovers lying on the dune
Turn from each other toward the moon
And feel a tide far mightier
Than mortal love mount up to her
Who drowns in her magnetic flood
Mere urgencies of flesh and blood.
This is the hour the dying pass
Without a sigh to mist the glass,
So gently the translation made
From shadows to the world of shade.
So one who walks alone will stand
With love and death on either hand,
Invisible companions, who
Though cunningly disguised as two
Yet in reality are one,
Love the flesh, and death the bone.
He walks and feels the spectres glide
Along with him on either side,
And closer draws, to ward them off,
His cloak of loneliness, the stuff

Of pride, the pattern of control,
To hold them from his naked soul.
The long boardwalk lies dim before
Across the salt marsh to the shore.
My brother Sea, how tide on tide
Your waters shift, while you abide;
From wave on wave, lost in each other,
Your undiminished voice, my brother.
My sister Moon, how ray on ray
Is woven your unearthly day;
From ever changing gleam and glister
Your constancy of light, my sister.
My father God, how thought on thought
Your undiscovered mind is wrought;
From love whose end is death you gather
Your everlastingness, my father.
This is the hour the heart discovers
How love is mightier than lovers,
And this the hour the dying pass
Through death and know not what it was.
And one shall stand upon the shore
And he shall ponder them no more
But dive into the sea, and swim
Far out, and peace shall go with him.

PHI BETA KAPPA ODE *

I

Come from over the sea, bright on the feet of the sunrise,
Golden promise of spring that the summer never redeems;
Weary alike of our wars and the long disenchantment of peacetime
We would be freed from our facts and released from our pitiful schemes;
Young is the earth and adorned for the men who will take on their manhood,
Luring her creatures with beauty to follow impossible dreams.

II

Now doth America glow as the makers of myth have beheld her,
She is the vanished Atlantis, the hallowed Hesperides;
Delicate thoughts from her childhood unfold on the lawn and the peachbough,
Voices of poets forgotten speak in the shells of her seas.
Old is the land, first born of the Ocean, and shaped by the stormwind;
Old, yet as young as the flowers that cover her granite knees.

* Read before the Harvard Chapter, Monday, June 17, 1929.

III

Meadowlarks whistle an answer to watery notes of the wood-
thrush,
Undulant tides are shaken with flakes of blinding light;
Green with the golden green that lasts but a day, the birch-
tree
Flutters and lifts in the wind as a dancer straining to flight.
Freshets flow over the cliffside, frogs jingle in marshlands;—
This is my country, none other, but who has beheld it
aright?

IV

Who from the thousands that pass on the loud highways of
concrete
Look on this land and discover its joys and know it their
own?
Rather, alas! they appraise it and mar it with hovels and
billboards,
Foreigners still to its beauty, seeking its money alone.
Where are its farmers and citizens, each with inherited free-
hold
Worthy in stature and thought of the country their fathers
have known?

V

Where are the poets? They flee overseas or remaining, half-hearted,
Vaunt the despair of the spirit in verse without measure or rhyme.
Where are the lawmakers?—they who imagine a sin in the winecup
While in the streets of the cities flash the dark lanterns of crime.
Many are mad, many false, whom democracy crowns by divine right;
Let other nations take warning, and call back their monarchs in time.

VI

Look not for help to the learned (philosophers these by their patent);
Life is to them but a lexicon writ in a barbarous tongue;
How should they know that the poets are stammering only their selfhood?
They, who are scarcely aware how the pitfalls of being are sprung!
Look not to these, it is they who opposed a flat world to Columbus;
Flat is the world they oppose to the voyaging thoughts of the young.

VII

Who are America's lovers? the boastful, the dull, the complacent?
Gazing on waste and stupidity, pleased with the things they have seen?
Or those who contemplate the joyful republic their fathers intended,
Shedding invisible tears of the heart that a country so green
Under the jubilant spring light should harbour a people so joyless,
Seeking new thrills ever stronger and plying machine with machine.

VIII

Over America rumble the wheels of their disenchantment,
Tarrying nowhere at peace, pioneers with no hope of abode,
They would escape from themselves; forgetting their name and their birthplace;
Speed without purpose their joy, their progress the miles of the road.
Homeless and wandering bodies, they flicker through traffic of nightmares;—
"Which way to Nowhere?" *Nowhere,* the answering echoes forebode.

IX

Continent guarded from ages of blood by the waves of the swanpath,
Lovely mirage, blue rift of delight through the clouds of the west,
Excellent land ever westward, the haven of heroes who voyage
Toward the inviolate shore, from Death to the Isles of the Blest;
Pausing a while in the evening turn of the road I behold thee
Still as the myth-makers saw thee, and still with a spirit at rest.

X

Leagues of thy peace overtake me, from glimmering pastures a cowbell
Rings like the echo of planets, distant and liquid and clear;
Winds that blow from the orchard and breathe with the sweetness of orchards
Rustle a leaf from last autumn and startle a listening deer.
High on the cliff of the dusk like a picture painted by torch-light
Slowly I see the design of a nobler Republic appear.

XI

There are the men who will turn from their business to ponder
the hillside;
Home in the house of their fathers where also their sons
shall abide;
Knowing themselves as one voice in a music they hear but
a lifetime,
Voice with no echo, perhaps, and the theme of the music
denied.
Asking no more than their measure; singing, though nobody
hear them,
Peace to a world of confusion, and love to a world of pride.

XII

Confident-footed are these who walk on the paths of their
childhood;
Near them their fathers are sleeping; the roots of their being
go deep.
All the trees of this land are their brothers, the same dust that
bore them
Murmurs with manifold voice in the leafy byways they keep.
So shall their children give heed to them after their moment
of sunlight,
Weaving the kinship of men to their land. And the kinship
is sleep.

XIII

These are my countrymen, these shall arise and lay claim
to their homeland.
Few are they now, they are rich, they are poor, they are
scattered apart.
They are the tens among millions, the quiet ones in the out-
cry,
Not to be found in the pages of books or the panels of art.
Though I were weary of life I would live to untold genera-
tions
Could I but gaze on the commonwealth born of their mind
and their heart.

XIV

There should I hear the decrees of the elders frugal in law-
craft;
Shouts of the young and the happy in games that never are
scored.
Life in its perfected pattern of joys from the cradle to age-
hood
Moves to inaudible music of mortals tuned in accord.
Death is the resolution, the neither retarded nor welcomed,
Timely to those who have feared neither fortune nor fate nor
the sword.

XV

Knowledge hath art for a fellow and holiness jests in the vineyard;
Steel, that was tyrant to man, has taken the toil of the slave.
Knowing themselves as one link in the long generations, the wise men
Listen in thought for the counsel of those in the womb and the grave.
Nature who held in her archives the still hidden concept of manhood
Finds the redemption at last of the bountiful promise she gave.

XVI

Man has arisen to claim it, unawed by the darkness beyond him,
Glad that his body go back to the elements where it began;
One with the earth if the earth shall inherit the good of his lifetime,
One with the gods if they will that he share a more glorious plan.
Bondsman to death or immortal, content in the moment that bears him,
Fashioned at last as that long unattainable being—a Man.

XVII

That is the only America; no one has ever set foot there.
Columbus discovered it not, though he sought across infinite seas;
Always a glimpse on receding horizons; always to westward,
Yet,—by the visible beauty of twilight on blossoming trees!—
Real and alive, more real, more alive than the clamours and turmoil,
Follies and deeds of the foolish that happily perish with these.

XVIII

What if that land be the dream of an idle man on the highway,
Kindling from embers of sunset the flame of the Golden Fleece?
Out of a people who harried their brothers and flouted their prophets,
Dreamers, not more than a score of them, fashioned our vision of Greece.
Come then, O fair and deceptive, open our minds to receive thee,
Even as youth is renewed in the fugitive season of peace.

XIX

Come from over the hills, bright on the wings of the sunset,
Golden promise of spring that summer shall never reveal.
Swept with thy magic I see coming forth from the caves of
illusion
Those who have known but the shades of reality, seeking the
real.
So from the slumbering years the philosopher's dream is
accomplished,
Freed from the turbulent cycle of time the eternal Ideal.

MANORBIER

(To Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Machen)

It is green with ivy
But the stones are criss-crossed
With cracks and crannies,
Tooth-marks of the frost;
The roofless tower,
The sundered wall,
The gaping lancet,
Frost gnaws them all.
Time in transit
Measured by years
Has emptied the hall,
Rusted the spears.
The long rains fall
Where the marriage bed
Saw a virgin a wife
And the mother dead,
Saw the birth of the son
And the warrior head
White on the pillow
Stained with red.

Now it is summer
The swans float
Each with its double

On the scummy moat.
If you hear the fiddler
Playing his fiddle
It's the wind in the crannies
With dust in its throat.
If you hear the drummer
Tapping his drum
It's a dead branch hanging
Swinging and banging,
Summoning no one,
There is no one to come.

I was born in a chamber
Under the eaves;
The room I remember
And the sound of leaves
And the sound of ocean
And ships come home
When we ran with our welcome
Knee-deep through foam.

With toy sword brandished
And toy horn blowing,
Child cries to the father,

"The old raven is dead!"
And the father to the child:
"Your mother is dead!"
And somebody said,
"He speaks of the raven
When his mother is dead."

In the garden by moonlight
Each leaf on the rose-bush
A silver flake,
A ghost of a flame!
Hearing voices, the loveless one
Fired by their passion
Fled down to the lake
Where a tall lady came.

"To-morrow at sunset,"
She said to her lover,
"Look up to my window
And I will be there."
She glimmered away,
And faint like a halo
The moon on her hair.

Most beautiful lady,
How slowly the snail
Through the grey dust lengthens
His rainbow trail.
On the steps of the sunset
Did I find you—or not?
How should you remember
When your lover forgot?

Is there nobody now
Who can speak with my speech
But the wind in the ruin,
The waves on the beach?
There are hundreds of cities
Out there beyond reach,
Three thousand miles over
The sea whence I came.
I built them myself,
I left this to the weather
And forgot my own name.

I will go up the stairway
That ends in the air,
I will stand in the chapel

And offer a prayer
To saints who for ages
Have not been there.
I will lean out of windows
That have no top
And look far below me
A dizzy drop
To the moat and the cliff
And beyond to the beach
And beyond to the ocean
Where the eyes stop.

Why did I leave
  this house like a Viking?
Why did I leave it
  for frosts to crack?
Did the stairway lead me
  then to disaster?
Did the door ajar
  show the flame and the rack?
I have forgotten the cause of my going,
And even the cause of my coming back.

Some things with me
  are the never-dying,

All of us cursëd
  with time's effacement;
The ivy-vine grown
  so black has forgotten
The beginning tendril
  that clung to the basement;
The gap in the wall has forgotten the window,
And I, the face that looked down from the casement.

Now is the season when the whole world over
The herds are munching the ripe clover;
The green baby-hair of the crops to come
Is ruffled by the wind; the may-flies hum
In the air, and the bees intermittently humming
Dive to one flower and drone to a sweeter;
This is the mating-song season, at evening
When the lover listens his love will be coming.

But summer like winter
Conspiring slowly
To throw down the mighty
And exalt the lowly
Is gnawing at walls
All but time held holy.
By tendrils of ivy

The stones are split;
Trees shoulder the ingles
Where earls would sit,
And the ants drag the mortar
Away, bit by bit.

Who is my brother?
Who is my friend?
The song does not falter
Though the singer end.
But I, the last singer,
Forgetting my song
One summer morning
A thousand years long,
Have gone up the stairway
That ends in the air,
Surprising dead saints
With the ghost of a prayer,
And looked out of windows
That have no top,
To the beach, to the ocean,
Where the eyes stop.
But the mind will not stop.
The heart will not stop.

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